

CD 2010 -- 105/6



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF MUSIC

ORCHESTRA SERIES

University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra

David Briskin, conductor

James Parker, piano

Saturday, November 6, 2010

7:30 p.m. MacMillan Theatre

Edward Johnson Building

2010-11

A joyous music season

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

David Briskin, conductor

PROGRAM

Disc 1

①

The Hebrides Overture, Op. 26

Felix Mendelssohn

(1809-1847)

Kerim Anwar, graduate student conductor

②

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

Robert Schumann

(1810-1856)

Allegro affettuoso

Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso -

Allegro vivace

James Parker, piano

Rupert E. Edwards Chair in Piano Performance

Disc 2

INTERMISSION

①

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

Johannes Brahms

(1833-1897)

Allegro non troppo

Andante moderato

Allegro giocoso

Allegro energico e passionato

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Program Notes

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Overture: The Hebrides, Op. 26 (Fingal's Cave) (1830-1832)

Mendelssohn made his earliest trip to the Scottish Hebrides when he was 20. For an educated German, Scotland was the stuff of legend: a romantic, remote land evoked by the poet Ossian in epic ballads and by Sir Walter Scott in his novels. Travelling from London by stage-coach, Mendelssohn preserved his first glimpse of the islands in a pencil sketch. Later that same day, August 7, 1820, after taking a paddle-steamer to the picturesque fishing village of Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, he wrote a letter to his family back in Germany: "In order to make you realize how extraordinarily the Hebrides have affected me, the following came into my mind here," he wrote. He then made another sketch - this time 21 measures of music, with an indication as to which instruments he imagined in his mind's ear. Later, he used the melody in these sketches in an overture he subsequently wrote, precisely replicating all 21 measures in the opening. The complete work, however, was to be several years in the making.

When he jotted down the opening theme, Mendelssohn had not yet seen Fingal's cave, with its dramatic basalt pillars supporting a 170-foot high arch, on the tiny isle of Staffa, seven miles from the Scottish mainland. "Its many pillars make it look like the inside of an immense organ, black and resounding absolutely without purpose, and quite alone, the wide grey sea within and without," Mendelssohn's travelling companion, the young diplomat Carl

Klingemann, wrote at the time. Fingal was the hero of what purported to be an old epic Gaelic poem. However, many realized that it was largely a work of fiction by James Macpherson, its 18th century 'translator.' Even if he was familiar with this debate about a fictional Fingal, this did not inhibit Mendelssohn from exercising his creative imagination.

Seasickness seems to have prevented him from doing more work on the overture at the time. Later in the year, he began to refer to the piece as *The Tale of the Hebrides*. The following year, he resumed work on the overture and said that he now wished to title it *The Solitary Isle*. He played through a version of the overture on the piano for the French composer Hector Berlioz. Still finding that it "smells more of counterpoint than of train-oil and seagulls and salted cod," Mendelssohn then produced a new score. The overture was given its première at a Philharmonic Society concert in London, in May 1832. Now it was called *Overture to the Isles of Fingal* and both the orchestral parts and a version for piano, four-hands were published, though with differing titles. For a later performance in Leipzig, Mendelssohn gave it the title *Ossian in Fingal's Cave*.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54 (1841-1845)

"It would of course have to be accounted a loss if piano concertos were to fall out of favour altogether," Schumann wrote in an 1839 essay.

Schumann the music critic was lamenting the slim pickings among piano concertos since the death of Beethoven. In his journal the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, he commented that recent advances in both piano construction and piano technique had fundamentally changed the balance between piano and orchestra. What was needed, he concluded, is "a genius who will show us in a new and brilliant way how to combine the orchestra with the piano such that soloists, dominant at the keyboard, can display the riches of their instrument while the orchestra is allowed to act as more than a mere bystander."

That was 1839. With five previous attempts at a concerto behind him, Schumann now tackled a sixth, in D minor, attempting to forge this new balance between piano and orchestra. But, having set the bar high in the *NZM* article, he felt that his draft fell short of his own standards. "I can't write a concerto for virtuosos; I have to think of something else," Schumann told his fiancée, the 20 year-old internationally renowned pianist Clara Wieck. "It is going to be a hybrid of symphony, concerto, and grand sonata." Wieck had to wait until August 1841 for such a new work when Schumann presented his bride of less than a year with a new A minor *Phantasie*. Although she rehearsed the single-movement fantasy with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, a public performance did not follow. Schumann's seventh attempt to marry pianistic display with symphonic coherence became a work in progress. Both musicians had a more immediate concern: Clara, nine months pregnant, was about to give birth to the first of the couple's eight children.

UPCOMING U OF T SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONCERTS

Saturday, February 5

David Briskin, conductor
Lindsay Barrett, soprano
Erica Iris Huang, mezzo soprano
Michael Colvin, tenor
Andrew Love, baritone

A special Faculty of Music event to welcome Dean Don McLean, featuring wind, brass, jazz and opera performances. The celebration culminates in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 performed by the UTSO and the MacMillan Singers and Master Chorale. 7:30 pm. MacMillan Theatre.
Tickets: \$15 (\$10 seniors/students)

Saturday, April 9

David Briskin, conductor
Christopher Hwang, cello

Dvořák *Carnival Overture*
Shostakovich *Cello Concerto*
Bartók *Concerto for Orchestra*
7:30 pm. MacMillan Theatre.
Tickets: \$15 (\$10 seniors/students)

In fact, the *Phantasie* was not heard again until the 1960s. At the time, Clara (who had already written an A minor piano concerto of her own) wrote in her diary: "The piano is interwoven with the orchestra in the most subtle manner; neither can be imagined without the other." Schumann, likely acting on the advice of both his soloist and his publisher, now reworked the piece as the first movement of a full concerto. He began with the finale in June 1845, the slow movement the following month, then, after revising the fantasy, the three-movement concerto that we know today was complete. The première in Dresden, with Wieck as soloist, established the work's reputation. This was consolidated with a further performance under Mendelssohn in their home town of Leipzig. More performances followed in Vienna and Prague, with Schumann conducting.

After a striking opening flourish, the opening movement is, for the most part, entirely based on the lovely melody first introduced by woodwinds and horns. There are many changes of mood throughout the movement, in particular a dreamy, nocturnal A flat dialogue at the mid-point between piano and clarinet. This can be traced back to a Romantic composer's initial desire to fuse the movements of a large-scale work together into the single-movement fantasy. Schumann similarly fuses together the traditional concerto orchestral and solo passages into an organic whole. The first movement cadenza is wholly written-out, maintaining both forward momentum and thematic development within the movement. It concludes with a playful quick-march coda from the

winds. Loud chords from the orchestra bookend this imaginatively structured movement. The middle movement is a spacious intermezzo in the form of a dialogue between soloist and orchestra. Towards the end, reminiscences of the first movement's opening theme simultaneously look back in time and forward to the finale. Schumann worked long and hard at achieving this short transition. The finale is the most animated of the three movements and the most flamboyant. Its rhythmically ingenious second theme adds to the exuberance of mood.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)
**Symphony No. 4 in E minor,
Op. 98 (1884-1885)**

"It's a few entr'actes which together form what is called a symphony," Brahms said of his new symphony in front of a famous conductor. "Don't spend a penny on it," he advised his publisher. "It's a bunch of polkas and waltzes," he told a music critic. Brahms, in other words, was being Brahms and deflecting criticism before it arrived, building a protective shell around a work which was near and dear to his heart. The E minor Symphony is his greatest essay in symphonic writing, a monumental drawing together the architecture of the Baroque with the Romanticism of the world around him. It is his final word on the subject. It is also a tragic work, his darkest symphony and, as Hans von Bülow the conductor to whom Brahms made the quip about "entr'actes" reported after rehearsals: "[It is] gigantic, altogether a law unto

itself, quite new, steely individuality. Exudes unparalleled energy from first note to last."

Outwardly, the Fourth follows the familiar road map of the traditional classical-romantic symphony: a quick first movement, slow second, contrasting lively third and conclusive finale. Its instrumentation similarly stays on track. But the work is more tightly written than other Brahms symphonies and the cross references across its four movements are complex and intellectually challenging. Brahms's close musical friends thought he was being too academic in the piece. After hearing it played on two pianos, Edward Hanslick, the critic, said: "All through, I felt I was being thrashed by two terribly clever men." Today, in performance, many of these subtleties are more sensed than heard and a century of harsher, more confrontational sounds by way of new music have immunized our ears against sonorities that Brahms's friends found initially unpalatable.

The first movement has a yearning, wistful, often restless character and, just as its sighing main theme is reprised, the music alludes to the third of Brahms's Four Serious Songs – "O Death, O

Death, how bitter you are" are the words of the song at this point. The preoccupation with mortality continues in the slow movement which Richard Strauss heard as "a funeral procession moving in silence across moonlit heights." Brahms composed his third movement, a scherzo, last and carefully calculated its contrasting mood. "Three kettledrums, triangle, and a piccolo will, naturally, make something of a show," he said, dryly. For the finale, still confronting Death, Brahms incorporates a brief eight-bar theme from Bach's Cantata No. 150: "My soul longs for thee, O God." Around it, turning to the Baroque musical form of the passacaglia, he builds an imposing series of 32 variations. He'd done a similar thing in his *Haydn Variations*. But this was the first time that a composer – any composer – had done this in a symphony (and it set a precedent that others were soon to follow in the new century). Firmly anchored in E minor yet magnificently contrasted, the variations build with cumulative power to a monumental conclusion.

Notes © 2010 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca



James Parker talks about his childhood, the Schumann Concerto and much more in the exclusive interview on our new YouTube channel.

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Biographies

A conductor renowned for the versatility of his repertoire and the depth of his musical interpretations, **DAVID BRISKIN** has been the Music Director and Principal Conductor of The National Ballet of Canada since 2006. In July 2008, he was appointed Director of Orchestral Studies at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music and Conductor of the University of Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Prior to his appointment with the National Ballet, Mr. Briskin served as conductor with American Ballet Theatre for seven years, leading performances at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York's City Center and in major opera houses throughout the world. Mr. Briskin is a regular guest conductor with the New York City Ballet and San Francisco Ballet and has appeared with numerous ballet and modern dance companies throughout North America.

In addition to his work in dance, Mr. Briskin has enjoyed great success on the concert stage. He has conducted the Pittsburgh, Detroit, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Syracuse, Akron, Cincinnati Pops, and Singapore Symphony Orchestras; the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Juilliard Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica where he conducted the Latin American premiere of John Corigliano's monumental First Symphony. Equally at home in the opera house, Mr. Briskin's opera schedule has taken him throughout the U.S., Canada and Europe, including performances of *La Bohème* in Italy; with the Calgary Opera, Manitoba Opera, Opera Carolina, Opera Columbus, New England Conservatory, Sarasota Opera, and Lake

George Opera. For six years he served as the Music Director of the Masterwork Chorus and Orchestra, conducting annual performances of Handel's *Messiah* at Carnegie Hall.

Raised outside of Boston, he attended the Indiana University School of Music and received a Bachelor of Music degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music and a Master's degree from Queens College, City University of New York.

In the realm of Canadian pianists, **JAMES PARKER**, quite simply, is among the best known. Accomplished, versatile, brilliant, are descriptors all frequently linked to this most sought after artist.

Mr. Parker's achievements are both lengthy and impressive. James' musical roots can be traced to the Vancouver Academy of Music and University of British Columbia where he studied with Kum Sing Lee, and then went on to complete his Masters and Doctoral with Adele Marcus at The Juilliard School. Mr. Parker continues the teaching tradition as the *Rupert E. Edwards Chair in Piano Performance* on the music faculty at the University of Toronto.

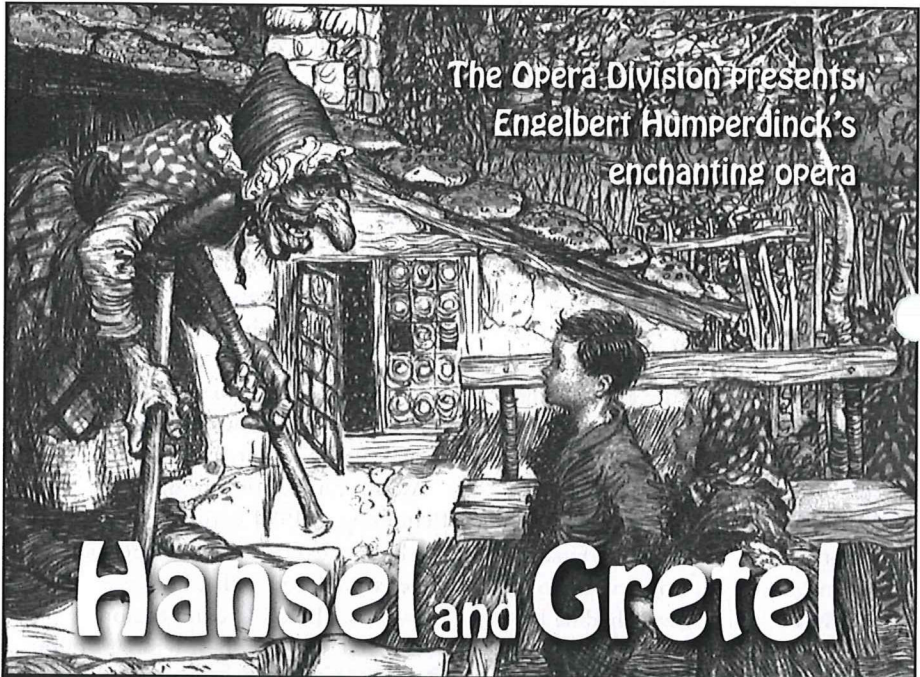
Awards came early and often. Beginning in 1984 with a first prize at the Eckhardt-Gramatte Competition, James served notice that he was a rising star. The CBC competition concurred, selecting him winner of the 25th National Competition for Young Performers. The Virginia P. Moore Award as the most promising young classical artist soon followed, further solidifying Parker's place as one of Canada's best.

On-air programs have repeatedly sought out his performances. Mr. Parker has made frequent appearances on CBC, and performances on Bravo!, the CanWest Global Network, MuchMusic and a myriad of stations across the globe.

Concerts given by Mr. Parker are artistic wonders. James' style has earned him *The Globe and Mail's* praise as "One of the most searching musical intellectuals and 10 of the nimble fingers in the business." James has enthralled audiences in North America and Europe, counting diplomats and dignitaries among his receptive audiences.

A consummate professional, James is recognized as a soloist and chamber musician. He is the pianist for Canada's foremost ensemble: the Gryphon Trio. Add to this Mr. Parker's critically acclaimed performances with major Canadian symphonies like Toronto, Vancouver, National Arts Centre, Nova Scotia and many in between, one is reminded of the scope of his contributions to the national classical music scene. With two JUNO awards and many other nominations from his vast discography, James Parker continues to graciously strive to do it all.

James Parker is a Steinway Artist.



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